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INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
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RUEHFSI/DIR FSINFATC PRIORITY  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1926  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0084  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0371  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0835  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0075  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0852  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0261  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000079

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/16/2016  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: THE POLITICS OF UNREST IN PESHAWAR

CLASSIFIED BY: Gautam Rana, Political Officer, U.S. Consulate ,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The anti-cartoon protests in Peshawar and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) on February 15 resulted in three deaths (including a child), 60 injured, and widespread looting and destruction of businesses. The extensive rioting appears to have been ignited by religious fervor fueled by the main religious parties in the province, augmented by political motivations to undermine the government of President Pervez Musharraf as well as business rivalries and opportunistic looting. The size of the demonstrations and the extent of the damage has shaken up the populace, a segment of which is ready to blame Afghan refugees as the culprit. End comment.

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Damage  
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¶2. (U) The damage in Peshawar on February 15 was widespread, with the South Korean transport group Sammi-Daewoo, Norwegian telecommunication giant Telenor and the U.S. fast food franchise KFC suffering the most vicious attacks. The KFC and sixteen Daewoo buses were set ablaze, and the Telenor office completely ransacked. The mob also attacked and looted three movie theaters, several banks, many stores, gas stations, and private vehicles.

¶3. (SBU) Local newspapers estimate a total of 40 to 70 thousand protestors participated in various events throughout the day, and economic losses total in the tens of millions of rupees. Observers reported that some of the looting was led by Afghan refugees who entered the town from the surrounding refugee colonies. In some locations, police responded with tear gas and baton charges, and over 300 people were arrested. "It was the worst agitation in the history of Peshawar," said the Senior Superintendent of Police.

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Motives  
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¶4. (C) The ostensible reason for the protests was the European publication of the blasphemous cartoons. The Mutihida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), the six party religious coalition that

governs the NWFP, the Traders Grand Alliance, and various student groups had called for the demonstrations to protest the cartoons and generally denounce western influences. Elements of Shabab-e-Milli, the sister organization of the Jamiaat-e-Islami (JI) mainly comprised of religiously motivated students, appeared to be targeting the cable companies, and were enthusiastically cutting the cables leading into the residential colonies, dumping them on the road and setting them ablaze. This occurred in several areas of the cantonment district and other parts of the city. In general, the ferocity and agility of the youthful members of the mob -- in the vanguard of the protestors -- indicated that these individuals had been selected and tasked to damage public and private property, possibly for monetary or other gain.

15. (C) NWFP politicians also declared the protests had a political foundation. JI leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed announced to the media that these agitations would continue until the ousting of the current national government. He stated the protests were not only against the European cartoons, but against the "the rule of General Musharraf." NWFP Senior Minister (and JI) Sirajul Haq declared the protests took place because the federal government had not properly "represented" the views of the people, and accordingly, the people had the right to demonstrate. Peshawar nazim (JUI-F mayor) Ghulam Ali also publicly backed the demonstrators. However, Chief Minister Akram Khan Durrani (JUI-F) denounced the looters, while condemning the cartoons. He defended police actions to maintain law and order, and announced schools will be closed for the next seven days.

16. (C) Business rivalries also played a part in the demonstrations. The sixteen Daewoo buses were burned by "so-called transporter protestors," armed thugs who traded gunfire with the police. The police ultimately beat back the

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rioters by baton-charging and tear-gassing them. Post contacts have noted the superior service and quality of the Daewoo buses, a point not lost on local bus operators who had reportedly been losing market share to their Korean competitors and now squared accounts.

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Comment  
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17. (C) The extensive rioting has shocked Peshawaris. While it is too early to predict the political fall-out, more protests leading up to the March 3 nationwide strike are likely. Nonetheless, we are skeptical about the chance of additional outbreaks of violence because most of the city's soft targets are gone. The blame game for the looting and destruction has just begun, and one possible target is Afghan refugees. Though only a small portion of the looters, anti-Afghan resentment is strong in Peshawar, and their presence among the demonstrators has angered city residents. End comment.  
SPANGLER